

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 011 895 841 A

Constitutional Union party. Central ex. com.

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

The political aspect of the country fills the public mind with painful apprehension. The people are everywhere disturbed with the fear of some disastrous crisis. Many are alarmed for the safety of the Union. All are conscious that the sentiment of fraternity which once linked the States together, even more firmly than the compact of the Constitution itself, has been rudely shaken, and that discord has crept into the relationship of communities which should have found, both in the interests of the present and in the memories of the past, the strongest motives for mutual regard and confidence.

What has produced these general and unhappy convictions?

It has been too apparent to escape the most casual observation that, for some years past, there has been manifested a design, in the movements of influential political leaders, to force the country into an organization of parties founded on the question of slavery.

The first introduction of this subject into party politics engendered a controversy which has constantly increased in extent and bitterness, mingling with, or usurping the place of all other political questions, and giving to those party politics a greater and more dangerous vehemence. Considerations of the public welfare seem to be cast aside, to make room for wider and more unrestrained contention on this single and engrossing theme.

The two great parties in the country (the Democratic and Republican) have been the chief actors in this fatal contest, if not its authors. Whether they have always exerted themselves to allay the excitement to which it gave rise, or, on the contrary, have both of them occasionally employed it for the promotion of party purposes, it is not for us to determine. It is sufficient to note that the mind of the people has been industriously exercised by this contest to the service of sectional agitation, and that in its progress the teachings of the fathers of the republic, the lights of history, the landmarks of consti-

tutional power have been renounced, our old and revered traditions of policy spurned, and the welfare of the present and the hopes of the future been brought into jeopardy in the alternations of passionate challenge and defiance between the angry disputants.

It is not our purpose to arraign or to denounce either of these parties for their past errors or transgressions, but we regard it as an indisputable fact that by their conflicts they have been mainly instrumental in producing the present lamentable state of public affairs. It would be easy to establish this position by a reference to events in the recent history of the country, with which the public is but too familiar; but we purposely abstain from all comments upon them, as inconsistent with the limits of this address, and as tending to revive controversies which it is its object to allay. We will simply state, that the one, by its frequent and unnecessary intrusion of the slavery question into party politics, has exasperated sectional feeling at the North and increased the growing spirit of disunion at the South, while the other has been prompt to avail itself of these opportunities for anti-slavery agitation.

After having so long agitated the country by their reciprocal assaults, these parties are now preparing for a sectional struggle far exceeding in violence any that has yet occurred, the results of which may be disastrous to the country.

As an indication of the character of this struggle, of its objects and possible consequences, we need only point to the significant fact, that a convention has been called by one of these parties to select a candidate for the office of Chief Magistrate of the Union from which, by the necessary logic of its construction, fifteen States of that Union are excluded.

Solemnly impressed with these facts, a number of gentlemen from different parts of the country, among whom were members of the present Congress, and of Congresses of former date, recently assembled in the City of Washington to deliberate on means for averting dangers to which they may lead.

It was the unanimous opinion of the meeting, that immediate steps should be taken to organize a "Constitutional Union party," pledged to support "the Union, the Constitution and the enforcement of the laws."

This organization was accordingly commenced by the appointment of a "Central Executive Committee" charged with the general direction of the party and with the preparation of an address to the people of the United States.

We need not assure you, fellow citizens, that we approach this

task with diffidence and anxiety. We are aware of the difficulty which attends the endeavor, at any time, to persuade men to abandon political associations to which they are allied, either by interest or preference, and we know how much that difficulty is increased when party attachment is heightened by the ardor of expected success or inflamed by the zeal of opposition. But there are, nevertheless, junctures when honest-hearted citizens will be prepared, at any sacrifice of prejudice or opinion, to perform this duty to their country. It is the policy of the dominant parties to underrate the real strength of those whom disapprobation, indifference, or disgust force into the position of neutrals in political warfare. The ordinary tactics of parties teach them to discourage those whom they cannot enlist. But the fact is demonstrable that the numbers who occupy this position at all times, and more especially at the present time, constitute a most influential portion of the whole people. If the investigation could be made, there is reason to believe it would result in disclosing the fact that, as parties are now constituted, little less than a million of voters will be driven out of the sphere of active participation in the coming election. The old Whig strength of the country will be found to furnish no small contribution to this mass. Even those of that association who have been induced to take sides in recent elections with one or the other of the opponent divisions, acknowledge but scant fealty to their new leaders; and the greater number of them will, it is believed, be prompt to join their old comrades in rallying to a conservative field to fight a new battle for the cause of the Constitution and the restoration of lost harmony. Large numbers of the old Democratic party, who withdrew from the line of march when they discovered it leading towards internal strife, and the assault of the traditional policy by which that party achieved its former triumphs, would, we have no doubt, supply a powerful reinforcement to the friends of the Union.

In the American party, to which the breaking up of old organizations gave birth, and which has been active in the endeavor to establish an intermediate power between the contending forces that have engrossed the field, will be found a very large element of conservative strength to increase the volume of the proposed organization.

If we add to all these that mass of quiet, unobtrusive citizens, who have always shunned the turmoil of political life, content to leave the destiny of the country in the hands of those who, in the ordinary condition of the national progress, were most ambitious to assume its direction, and who have reposed such faith in the patriotism of their fellow men as to feel no concern in the

question of the supremacy of party, but whom the extraordinary incentives of a crisis like the present must awaken to the resolve of an effort to protect the threatened safety of the confederacy, we have elements sufficient, by their combination, to form a great party, to which additional strength will be imparted by the exalted patriotism of its principles and objects. Moreover, it is only just to the two contending parties to say, that we do not despair of finding in the ranks of each, numerous individuals who, tired of intestine strife, and alarmed at the threatening aspect of affairs, will unite with the only party which holds out to the country a prospect of repose.

Can it be possible that, with so glorious a cause before us, an appeal to the patriotism of the land founded on such inducements as the present exigency supplies, can fall upon unheeding ears, or fail to rouse the national heart to the great emprise of this commanding duty? Now, when every honest and thoughtful citizen within the broad confines of this Union, every true son of the republic at home and every brother of our lineage abroad, is filled with dismay at the sudden rupture of the national concord, can it be that the power which is able to pour oil upon the troubled waters, and bring gladness back to every good man's fireside, will withhold its hand from the labor? that this generation of American citizens, awakened by the clamor that threatens the integrity of our Union, and conscious of its faculty to command the ending of mad debate, and to re-establish the foundations of a healthful, just, and benignant administration of the duties and benefits of the Constitution, will play the sluggard in this momentous hour, and incur the everlasting shame of passively looking on upon the demolition of this fabric of confederated States? that this generation will prove itself so false to all generations to come as to permit, when it has the power to forbid, the destruction of this glorious heritage of so many millions of freemen, with such immortal memories clustering around the path of their history, with such grand hopes hovering over the career before them, the central point of so many blessings, the subject of so many prayers of the enlightened humanity of the whole world?

Let all men reflect upon the incredible folly of our quarrel.

The country is wrought into a tempest of excitement. Two great political armies are contending for mastery. Both are infuriated with a rage that threatens fearful extremes. The great mass of law-abiding citizens are looking on with amazement, and an ominous apprehension of mischief. And yet there is no danger impending over the Republic which human passions have not created, and which human wisdom may not prevent.

We have pointed out the chief source of the present agitation.

and think we have sufficiently shown that neither of the two parties who are now seeking to obtain the control of the Government can be safely entrusted with the management of public affairs. The only way to rescue the country from their hands is to organize a party whose cardinal principle shall be:—To remove the subject of slavery from the arena of party politics, and leave it to the independent control of the States in which it exists, and to the unbiased action of the judiciary;

To remove all obstacles from the due and faithful execution of the provisions for the rendition of fugitive slaves;

To cultivate and expand the resources of the country by such protection to every useful pursuit and interest as is compatible with the general welfare and equitable to all;

To maintain peace, as far as possible, and honorable relations to all nations:

To guard and enforce the supremacy of the laws by an impartial and strict administration of the powers granted by the Constitution;

To respect the rights and reverence the Union of the States as the vital source of present peace and prosperity, and the surest guarantee of future power and happiness;

To teach reconciliation, fraternity and forbearance, as the great national charities by which the Union is ever to be preserved, as a fountain of perennial blessings to the people.

Let these principles be taken to the hearts of those who pledge themselves to the support of the party, and let them actuate their private life as well as their public duty.

To promote this movement, measures should be adopted with as little delay as possible, such as will afford an opportunity to the party to exert a controlling influence on the approaching election, and to select candidates upon whom its vote may be effectively concentrated.

To this end we propose that a Convention be immediately held in each State, which shall assume the duty of embodying the whole conservative strength of each in such form as shall make it most effective:

That each of these Conventions shall make a nomination of two candidates for the Presidency, (omitting to nominate a Vice President,) to be selected from those most eminent and approved in public esteem, one of which candidates, at least, shall be a citizen of some other State than that in which he is nominated:

That these two candidates from each State shall be submitted to the consideration of a General Convention, to be assembled at Baltimore, at a time that shall be designated by the National Executive Committee, which General Convention shall be empowered to select from the whole number of the no-

minations transmitted to it, a candidate for President and Vice President, as the candidates of the Constitutional Union party:

That this General Convention shall consist of a representation from each State, composed of the same number of members as its representation in the two houses of Congress:

That this representation of each State be chosen either by the State convention itself, or in such other manner as such Convention, in view of the shortness of the time for the proceeding, may appoint.

A Convention constituted in accordance with this plan, we think, would be satisfactory to all parts of the country, and altogether competent to the duty of a discreet and judicious selection of candidates. The people who have so much reason, in their habitual experience of the insufficiency of Conventions, to feel no little distrust of these bodies, might prefer some other mode of nomination, if a better could now be adopted. But in the present emergency, when delay would render any attempt to make a nomination for the coming election useless, we are persuaded they will acquiesce in the plan proposed, as the best the time will allow. Such a Convention will avoid some of the objections to which the ordinary and accustomed composition of Conventions is exposed. It will be confined to the single duty of selecting the candidates from a number of eminent citizens presented by the several States as worthy of the first office in the Government; and it will, most probably, find in the concurring opinion of several State Conventions in favor of one or more individuals, a useful guide to the most acceptable nomination. And as it will be restricted in its choice to the names presented, it will under no circumstances offend the public wish by selecting candidates unknown to, or unrespected by the country.

Whether any other principles than those we have enumerated, shall be enunciated, it will be for the Convention to determine. "Platforms" have been so frequently employed as the shallow devices of party deception, that they have come to be viewed with distrust by the people. We know of no higher and nobler aim than the restoration of peace and harmony to a divided and distracted country, and no platform more acceptable to every true patriot than the "the Union, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the laws."

Fellow-citizens, the task that has been allotted to us is performed. We have pointed out a path by which, in our opinion, the country may be rescued from its perilous position. It is for you to determine whether you will pursue that path, or continue in one which, however the approaching struggle may terminate,

may lead to victory but not to peace; to a brief cessation of strife, but not to a restoration of harmony.

WASHINGTON, February 22, 1860.

JOHN J. CRITTENDEN, Ky., *Chairman*,
 WILLIAM C. RIVES, Va.,
 WASHINGTON HUNT, N. Y.,
 WILLIAM A. GRAHAM, N. C.,
 HENRY M. FULLER, Pa.,
 JOHN P. KENNEDY, Md.,
 HENRY Y. CRANSTON, R. I.,
 ALEXANDER R. BOTELER, Va.,
 JOHN A. ROCKWELL, Ct.,
 JOHN WHEELER, Vt.,
 J. MORRISON HARRIS, Md.,
 LEWIS CONDUCT, N. J.,
 CHARLES M. CONRAD, La.,
 MARSHALL P. WILDER, Mass.,
 JOSHUA HILL, Ga.,
 JOSEPH N. SNYDER, Ohio,
 WILLIAM TEMPLE, Del.,
 JOHN DUNHAM, Conn.,
 JOHN A. GILMER, N. C.,
 C. C. LATHROP, Pa.,
 R. W. THOMPSON, Ind.,
 N. W. SHELLEY, Ala.,
 GEORGE BRIGGS, N. Y.,
 WILLIAM G. BROWNLOW, Tenn.,
 WILLIAM L. TOOLE, Iowa,
 JOHN WILSON, Ill.,
 JERE CLEMENS, Tenn.,
 E. J. WHITLOCK, N. Y.,

Committee.

FRANCIS GRANGER,
Chairman National Whig Executive Com.,
 JACOB BROOME,
Chairman Nat. American Executive Com.,

0 011 895 841 A

permalife.
pH 8.5